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## THE DATE OF OVIEDO'S MAP OF THE MARACAIBO REGION

By RUDOLPH SCHULLER

One of the few known cartographical documents which refer directly to the expeditions in search of El Dorado undertaken during the Welser administration in Venezuela is a small pen sketch-map facsimiled in the Madrid edition of Oviedo's "Historia General y Natural de las Indias."<sup>1</sup> This map (Fig. 1), doubtless Oviedo's own work, bears no indication of date or authorship. It is plainly drawn and legibly written and, in the facsimile, measures 240 by 190 mm.<sup>2</sup> Degrees of longitude and latitude are missing. The map exhibits the section of the northern coast of South America between the Rio Grande (the present Magdalena River, Colombia) and Cape San Román (Venezuela), the Laguna de Maracaibo, the territories situated between the latter and the Rio Grande, and the hinterland to the south of the "Laguna" as far as the river called Yuma.<sup>3</sup>

The first description of this map was published by Henry Harrisse in his "Cartographia Americana Vetustissima,"<sup>4</sup> where it is included among the charts of 1532. The great savant, who was the foremost authority of his day on the history of early American cartography, assures us that "this map accompanied a relation sent to Charles V, concerning, apparently, the events which led to the death of the German governor of Venezuela," and that "Oviedo added a copy of it to his Historia General, because, said he [Oviedo], it differs materially from the one made by Alonso de Chaves."<sup>5</sup> Yet the chronicler of the Indies states explicitly: "*. . . . porque la figura que llevaron pintada, para que la Cesárea Magestad la viesse, es muy diferente de la carta, la qual pongo aqui*"<sup>6</sup> (because the figure [map] which they [the procurators] took with them, in order that the Imperial Majesty might see it, is much different from the chart I put here).

Harrisse was mistaken. The map which Luis González de Leyva and Alonso de Lallana, the two royal procurators of the province of Venezuela,

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<sup>1</sup> Historia General y Natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra-Firme del Mar Océano, por el Capitan Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdés . . . . . edited by José Amador de los Ríos, 4 vols., Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, 1851-55. The map is Pl. 3 of Vol. 2, 1852. The narrative is contained in Book XXV (Vol. 2, pp. 269-331).

<sup>2</sup> Harrisse, *op. cit.* in footnote 4, p. 592, gives "240 by 100 mm."

<sup>3</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 276a (i. e. first column).

<sup>4</sup> Forming Part Third of his "The Discovery of North America: A Critical, Documentary, and Historic Investigation," London, 1892; reference on p. 592.

<sup>5</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 270a.

<sup>6</sup> Harrisse's mutilated transcript of Oviedo's text shows plainly that he misunderstood the Spanish original.

presented to the emperor Charles V was altogether different from the one inserted by Oviedo in Book XXV of his “General and Natural History of the Indies.” As to the date of 1532 ascribed by him to Oviedo’s map of the

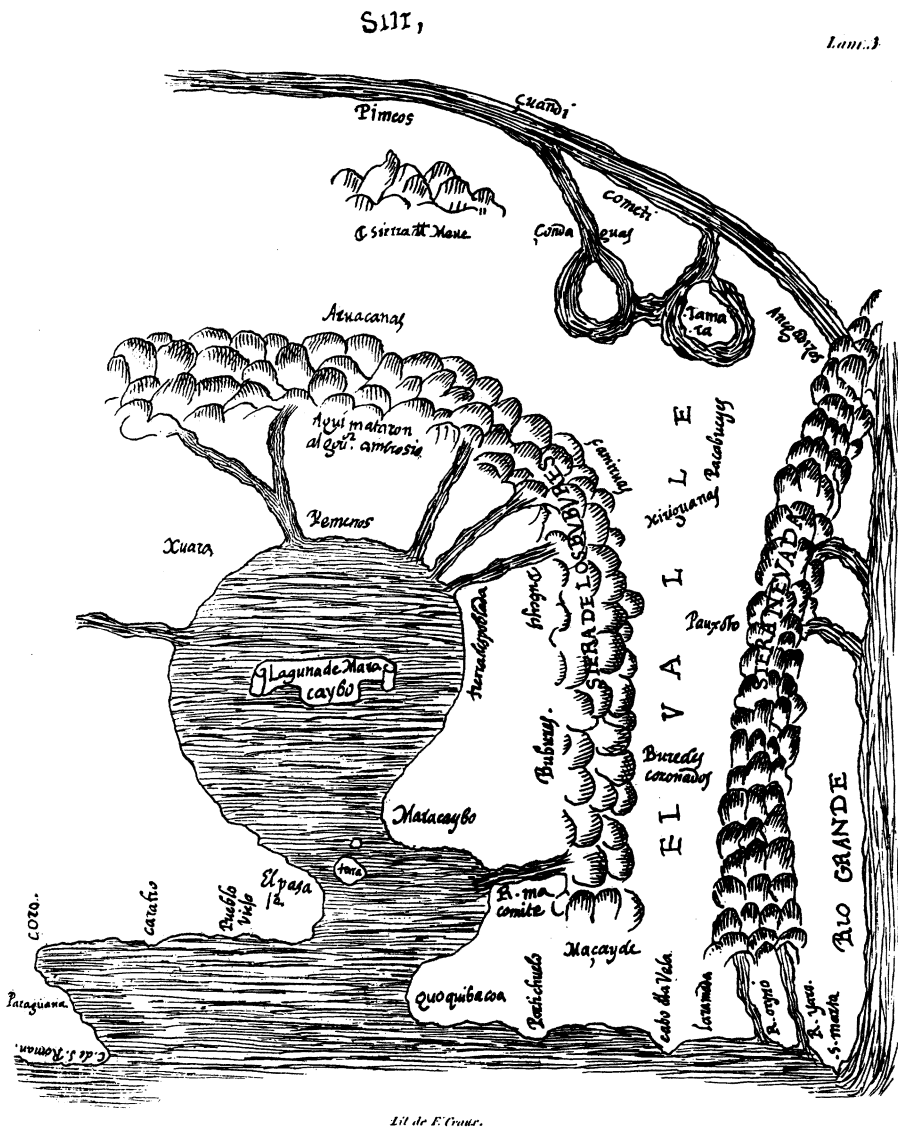


FIG.1—Facsimile of Oviedo's map of the Maracaibo region. (From Pl.3 of Vol.2 of Oviedo's "*Historia General y Natural de las Indias, etc.*," edited by José Amador de los Rios, 4 vols., Madrid, 1851-55.) South is at the top. A modern representation of the region is shown in the northwestern corner of the map on p.259 in this number.

Maracaibo region, we may say that there was no other reason for adopting it than the legend which refers to the fate of the German adventurer

Ambrosio Ehinger,<sup>7</sup> called also Alfinger and sometimes Dalfinger.<sup>8</sup> This legend, at the foot of the mountains to the south of the "Laguna," reads as follows: *Aquí mataron / al gou.or ambrosio* (here they killed Governor Ambrosio). And, according to Harris, he was killed by the Indians in the summer of 1532.

Now let us examine this point. Ambrosio Alfinger arrived at Coro, February 24, 1528.<sup>9</sup> In the same year he led the first exploring expedition into the territory of the Onoto<sup>10</sup> Indians, a poor and harmless fisher-people—the "masters of the Laguna"<sup>11</sup>—whose houses were built upon piles.<sup>12</sup> They occupied likewise the territories situated to the west of the narrows (*El pasaje*<sup>13</sup>) of the "Laguna," where Ambrosio Ehinger founded a little town. This place was named Maracaibo, in honor of the Onoto *cacique* who, with his tribe, first settled down in the very vicinity of the new Spanish colony.<sup>14</sup> Soon afterwards Alfinger returned to Coro.<sup>15</sup>

After having settled the affairs of the colony and made Luis Sarmiento acting governor, Ambrosio started again in the summer of 1530<sup>16</sup> to explore the eastern shores and adjoining parts of the "Laguna." During this voyage he discovered the province of Xuara (Ajudua, or Xuruara) which, according to Oviedo's map, was situated to the southeast of the "Laguna." There he embarked, and went to the town of Maracaibo.

In the meantime, his brother Georg, with 123 new Spanish colonists and 24 German miners, had arrived in Coro.<sup>17</sup> Georg Ehinger made an attempt to depose Sarmiento and to create himself governor. There were serious troubles, and Georg was finally compelled to leave the settlement. He re-embarked and returned to Hispaniola.

Afterwards came Nikolaus Federmann.<sup>18</sup> When he landed at Coro, Ambrosio had already been about eight months in the interior.<sup>19</sup> And on

<sup>7</sup> There were three brothers: Enrique (Heinrich), Jorge (Georg), and Ambrosio (Ambrosius) Ehinger. In the Spanish documents they are often confounded with Cinquer; cf. "Capitulación que se tomó con Enrique Cinquer y Guillermo (Jeronimo?) Sayller, para la pacificación de la Provincia de Santa Marta," Madrid, March 27, 1528: in *Colecc. Docs. Inéd.*, Vol. 22, Madrid, 1874, pp. 251-256.

<sup>8</sup> *Historia de la Conquista y Población de la Provincia de Venezuela*, escrita por D. José de Oviedo y Baños, 2 vols., Madrid, 1885.

<sup>9</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 269a.

<sup>10</sup> This name is evidently of Carib origin. Oto, in Carib, means "people"; cf. Purug-oto, Cacipag-oto, Cumanag-oto, Parag-oto, etc.

<sup>11</sup> "Relación de las tierras y provincias de la gobernación de Venezuela," in Oviedo y Baños, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 229.

<sup>12</sup> See the description of the lake-dwellers encountered by Américo Vespucci, in 1499; "... we landed in a port where we found a village built over the water, like Venice. There were about forty-four houses, shaped like bells, built upon very large piles, having entrances by means of drawbridges, so that, by laying the bridges from house to house, the inhabitants could pass through the whole. When the people saw us they appeared to be afraid of us, and, to protect themselves, suddenly raised all their bridges and shut themselves up in their houses." (Vespucci's letter on his so-called second voyage, in F. A. de Varnhagen: *Américo Vespucci*, Lima, 1865.)

<sup>13</sup> See the map, Figure 1, and Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 295a: "... the port, or strait of Maracaybo."

<sup>14</sup> Konrad Haebler: *Die überseeischen Unternehmungen der Welser und ihrer Gesellschafter*, Leipzig, C. L. Hirschfeld, 1903, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> The explorations carried out by governor Ehinger in the vicinity of the Laguna de Maracaibo in 1529 and 1530 are not mentioned by Oviedo. See on this subject Haebler, *loc. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.* in footnote 24, pp. 14-16.

<sup>18</sup> March 8, 1530, *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> January 15, 1530, *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

April 18, 1530,<sup>20</sup> there disembarked Hans Seissenhofer, who, being the representative of Heinrich Ehinger and Hieronymus Sailer, was recognized as legal governor during the absence of Ambrosio. The latter, however, secretly informed by his friends of all that happened in the colony, returned immediately to Coro, where he appeared fifteen days after Seissenhofer's arrival.<sup>21</sup> On July 30, 1530,<sup>22</sup> Ambrosio left for Santo Domingo, where he remained until his return to Coro on January 27, 1531.<sup>23</sup>

During this time Federmann, the acting governor, accomplished, although against the orders he had received from Ambrosio, the expedition into the interior, which is described in so boastful a manner in the "Indianische Historia."<sup>24</sup>

On Ambrosio's return to Coro the reports made by the Indians as to the abundance and richness of gold in a certain "province" situated to the south of the regions he had explored in his previous voyages were so flattering that he concluded to organize a new expedition in search of that wonderland.

Bartolomé de Santillana had been appointed acting governor. On June 9, 1531, Ambrosio was again under way,<sup>25</sup> in search of the Indians Pacabuyes, who, according to the information given by his Indian guides, dwelt in the beautiful valley between the "Sierra Nevada" (de Santa Marta) and the "Sierra de los Bubures"<sup>26</sup> (Sierra de Perija). First of all, he went to the town of Maracaibo, to make there all further provisions for the difficult and dangerous journey. The next step taken was the reconnoitering of a river called by the native Indians Macomite, which flows into the "Laguna" about ten leagues north of the aforesaid village.<sup>27</sup> The vessel and the two boats sent up this river, however, had to return after four days, on account of the many and perilous shallows in the upper course.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Luis Gonzalez de Leyva had gone into the interior to gather provisions for the colony and the explorers. After his safe return, Ambrosio started from Maracaibo, September 1, 1531.<sup>28</sup> In the country of the Bubures Indians he reviewed his company, having then with him 40 horsemen and 130 *peones*. From thence he entered the mountains and arrived finally in the province of the Buredes Coronados, Indians whose language did not differ very markedly from that spoken by the Bubures. The nickname *coronados* refers evidently to the strange kind of

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*; Haebler, *op. cit.*, p. 172, however, says "April 28, 1530."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Haebler, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>24</sup> "Indianische Historia," first printed at Hagenau, 1557; reprinted, with notes, by Dr. Karl Klüpfel as No. 46 in the series *Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart*, Stuttgart, 1859.

<sup>25</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 270a.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* See also the map, Figure 1.

<sup>27</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 270b.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

hair-cutting noticed among these Indians, which, according to Oviedo,<sup>29</sup> was very similar to that used by the Benedictine monks. The next Indians he met were the Coanaos, settled in the valley between the "Sierra Nevada" and "Sierra de los Bubures," about 25 leagues distant from "Cabo de la Vela." They spoke almost the same idiom as the former, but did not practice tonsure.

Proceeding then in a southerly direction, he reached the "province" of the Xiriguanas,<sup>30</sup> a people whose language was entirely different from the one spoken by the Coanaos. Among the Xiriguana Indians the art of tattooing was also observed. His next sojourn was in a village of an Indian tribe called Camiruas, where were found traces of some Spanish settlers from Santa Marta, who, likewise in search of gold, had passed there several days before. The huts of the Camiruas were abandoned, probably due to the excesses committed by the Spaniards. Ambrosio was in need of new guides. The poor Indians who had fled into the forest were therefore hunted like game by the heartless intruders. Finally they captured several of them, among whom was a chief who spoke the Xiriguana and Pacabuye languages. With this extremely useful guide Ambrosio went to Mococu,<sup>31</sup> one of the Pacabuye villages, where the adventurers stayed over night. Two days afterwards they reached a place called Pauxoto.<sup>32</sup> In this village Ambrosio awaited Captain Casimir Nueremberg, who had been left behind with the carriage.

About four leagues distant from the latter place were the settlements of the Indians called Haraacanas,<sup>33</sup> who used poisoned arrows and were mortal enemies of the Pauxoto. Their village was assaulted, and five or six of them were captured. No gold was found there "but evil poison in their arrows."<sup>34</sup>

On the next morning Ambrosio arrived again at the village of Pauxoto. The rich spoils already amounted to more than thirty thousand *castellanos*, or *pesos*. Ambrosio decided to send Captain Iñigo de Vascuña with thirty thousand pesos back to Coro. Vascuña departed with twenty-four peons from Pauxoto on January 6, 1532.<sup>35</sup>

Ambrosio continued the "pacific" conquest of the Pacabuyes. He left Pauxoto for Thamara, a great Pacabuye settlement of a thousand *buhios* (huts), situated in the marshy vicinity of a lake,<sup>36</sup> about eight leagues distant from the former place.

On April 10, 1532, he arrived at Conçepuçá, another Indian village

<sup>29</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 271a. Haebler, *op. cit.*, p. 200, speaks of "feather-crowns," presumably owing to a misunderstanding of the Spanish text.

<sup>30</sup> Of course, linguistically distinct from the Xiriguano-Tupí (Guarany) of the Bolivian Chaco.

<sup>31</sup> Haebler, *op. cit.*, p. 202, writes "Mocoa."

<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly the name of a Carib tribe.

<sup>33</sup> Probably a misreading of Arhuacos.

<sup>34</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 273a.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273b.

<sup>36</sup> Identified by some students with the Laguna de Zapatosá.

scarcely three leagues distant from Thamara. From thence, he went to Compachay, a Çondagua settlement situated on the banks of a great river.<sup>37</sup> This place was abandoned; its inhabitants had fled into the swamps. Yet, on the other side of the river, called by the Indians Yuma, there were many villages. Ambrosio was anxious to learn more of this interesting people and their country. He sent two of the seized Thamara Indians in a canoe to visit these villages and to tell the people of his good intentions. The Indian ambassadors succeeded in removing the fear of the natives. Shortly afterwards four small boats came with nineteen Indians, who informed Ambrosio that there were several places to the south, a day's journey distant, where gold abounded in great quantities. Especially the one named Çumiti, it was said, was a greater and richer village than Thamara. The Indian town called Çuyandio, or Çuandi, situated on the other side of the river Yuma, was likewise said to be another place with unbounded treasure.

Ambrosio, however, convinced that by proceeding with so small a company he would rush himself and his men into certain perdition, concluded to return. After a two days' journey they reached the Çondagua settlement of Çonçilloa, from which they departed on the following morning. Continuing, after two days they arrived again at Mococu (Mocoa; Çenmoa<sup>38</sup>) and after another day's journey at Iaxaran, an Indian village two leagues distant from Pauxoto.

More than three months had already elapsed since the departure of Captain Vasuña, whose return, of course, was anxiously awaited. Fearing some misfortune might have befallen him and his companions on their journey, Ambrosio decided to send Estéban Martin, an experienced man well acquainted with the Indian languages, with twenty peons to Coro so that he might learn of Vasuña's fate and return as soon as possible with the much-needed reinforcements.

Having completed the preparations for the perilous trip, Ambrosio saw Estéban Martin march from Iaxaran on June 24, 1532.<sup>39</sup>

Ambrosio had arrived at Iaxaran on April 20, 1532; he stayed there until September 9 of the same year.<sup>40</sup> The periodical inundations forcibly detained him. In the early autumn he continued his explorations in the Çondagua country. On September 17 following, he entered Zomico,<sup>41</sup> a great and rich village situated in the vicinity of a lake. The natives were friendly and hospitable, generous with their provisions, and possessed some gold, which they gladly exchanged for European trifles. Ambrosio departed thence on October 5, 1532. The next Çondagua villages he visited were Potome and Çilano, situated likewise on the border of the lake. Ambrosio

<sup>37</sup> The Magdalena, according to Haebler.

<sup>38</sup> Perhaps a misreading of the editor.

<sup>39</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 276b.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277a.

<sup>41</sup> "Zornico," in Haebler, *op. cit.*, p. 207, is surely a misreading; cf. Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 277a.

was informed again of the unbounded richness of gold to be found on the other side of the river Yuma. Yet he was already short of men; how could their reduced numbers withstand should they be suddenly attacked by the Indians? He dared not run the risk and so returned to Zomico.

In the meantime Estéban Martin, after a thirty-four days' journey across pathless and impenetrable virgin forests, had safely arrived at Maracaibo. He came in the nick of time. The Onoto Indians had risen against the Spanish settlers and lately killed fourteen of them. After having sent some of his men to Coro, in order to bring reinforcements, Estéban Martin went to put down the rebellion. The struggle lasted several days. Many of the Indians were killed and the rest dispersed or captured. The Spaniards had some killed and wounded; among the latter was Estéban Martin; who received five arrow-wounds.

Finally, after thirty-two days of anxious waiting, the reinforcements came. Estéban Martin was confined to his bed on account of his wounds. Nevertheless, this faithful man was immediately disposed to lead the relief force into the interior. With eighty-two men he left Maracaibo, and after several weeks he joined Ambrosio in the above-mentioned Condagua village, about a hundred and fifty leagues distant from Coro.<sup>42</sup>

Shortly afterwards Ambrosio resumed his journey. The goal was the Cumeti El Dorado, supposed to be encountered on the other side of the Yuma. An attempt to cross this river, however, failed. Ambrosio, sorely disappointed in his hopes, concluded to return to Coro.<sup>43</sup>

Continuing his voyage in a southerly direction, he reached the province of the Pimeos Indians, where he remained several days. On the right bank of the upper Yuma there dwelt Indians likewise called Xiriguanas,<sup>44</sup> yet "they were different" from those Ambrosio had previously met in the valley of the Pacabuyes.<sup>45</sup> On leaving the Xiriguanas he changed the direction of his route and went into "certain mountains," not very high although extremely craggy.

Of course it is a difficult task to ascertain, even approximately, where Ambrosio crossed over that "sierra." All that has been said on this subject by the chroniclers and the modern historians is mere speculation. According to Oviedo, whose account of Ambrosio's exploring expedition is undoubtedly based on the official relation which the aforementioned royal procurators presented to the emperor Charles V, Ehinger with his companions ascended the "Sierra del Mene."<sup>46</sup> At length they reached a thickly settled hamlet named "El Mene," in a "certain valley." The Indians fled. Rushing into the deserted dwellings, the invaders found some corn hidden in holes. Skirmishes with the Indians, whose name was Corbagos, were unavoidable. The Spaniards pursued the fleeing Indians to the summit of the "cordillera." After ten days of unsuccessful scouting they returned to Ambrosio's camp. They were short of provisions. The

<sup>42</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 278a.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279a.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279b.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272a.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281b.



corn was wholly consumed and they were compelled to kill some of their dogs. Harassed by hunger and by the elements, they continued their journey in those rough and inhospitable mountains. Eight of Ambrosio's companions and a hundred and twenty of the Indian servants died in the *páramos*, the bleak, cold uplands in the mountains. Among the victims was also Captain Casimir Nueremberg.<sup>47</sup>

Nothing could be more disheartening than the aspect of these rough and unpassable sierras inhabited by wild and warlike Indian tribes, who resented the intrusion of the strangers and tenaciously disputed every pass with the exhausted Spaniards. They were desperate. At last, the decimated squad arrived in the valley of the Aruacanas. The Indians, on seeing the Spaniards, however, burned their huts and fled into the woods. After a sojourn of several days at the "burned" village, Ambrosio pursued his journey. Finally he reached a valley, which is identified by the historians with the Valley of Chinacota.<sup>48</sup> There he met his fate. In a struggle with the Indians he was seriously wounded from a poisoned arrow which penetrated his throat. Four days afterwards he died.<sup>49</sup>

The news of Governor Ambrosio's death, which *must have occurred in the beginning of the year 1533, was not known at Coro until November 2 of the same year.*<sup>50</sup> Now, inasmuch as the legend referring to Ambrosio's death is the latest geographical and historical datum in Oviedo's map of the Maracaibo region, the extreme *terminus a quo* for that chart would be the last quarter of 1533, or the beginning of 1534.<sup>51</sup> Yet there are well-founded reasons to believe that Oviedo's map might have been made several years after that date, as the chronicler compares it with the "modern chart" (*Padrón General*, i.e. model chart) of the cosmographer Alonso de Chaves, saying<sup>52</sup> "that [the description of the coast of Venezuela] is so according to the modern chart of the cosmographer Alonso de Chaves."

We know that the *Padrón General* was first ordered by the emperor Charles V in October, 1526, and remained unfinished, so that on May 20, 1535, Queen Isabella of Portugal, the emperor's wife, ordered Fernando Columbus to cause the royal cosmographers to proceed with the work.<sup>53</sup> And Oviedo states expressly: "*La carta moderna del cosmógrafo Alonso de Chaves, que nuevamente se corrigió y emendó el año que pasó de mill é quinientos y treynta y seys años.*"<sup>54</sup> (The modern map of the cosmog-

<sup>47</sup> A former companion of Sebastian Cabot in his voyage to the river "Solis," afterwards called "Rio de la Plata."

<sup>48</sup> Haebler, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>49</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 284b. Haebler is evidently mistaken when he says (*op. cit.*, p. 182) "Ambrosius ist sie in Maracaibo am 17. November 1532 vorgelegt worden." (It [the ratification of the Royal *cédula*, dated February 17, 1531] was presented to Ambrosius in Maracaibo, November 17, 1532.) At that time Ambrosius was, as already said, struggling with the Indians of the "Sierra del Mene."

<sup>50</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 296a.

<sup>51</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 295a: "Mas porque de la gente que volvió por tierra se supo más particularmente de los pueblos por donde passaron . . . ." is a further proof of the correctness of this statement.

<sup>52</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 270a.

<sup>53</sup> Harisse, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-268 and 631-633.

<sup>54</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 149b.

rapher Alonso de Chaves, which was newly corrected and improved last year, one thousand five hundred and thirty-six.) Then again he says: "*Esto todo segund la carta moderna, fecha por el cosmógrafo Alonso de Chaves, el año de mill é quinientos y treynta y seys años, después que por el Emperador, nuestro señor, fueron mandados ver y examinar é corregir los padrones y cartas de navegar por personas dotas y experimentadas, que para ello fueron elegidas.*"<sup>55</sup> (All this according to the modern chart made by the cosmographer Alonso de Chaves, in the year 1536, after the Emperor our lord had ordered that the model charts (*padrones*) and sailing charts should be seen and examined by learned and experienced persons appointed to that effect.)

It has been thought necessary to relate all these incidents of Ambrosius Ehinger's eventful exploring expedition in search of El Dorado, as it is the only way in which to obtain an accurate basis for determining the date of Oviedo's map of the Maracaibo region. As has been seen, this cannot be 1532, as supposed by HARRISSE. The earliest possible date is the end of 1533 or the beginning of 1534, with the probability that the map was not drawn until after 1536.

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<sup>55</sup> Oviedo, Vol. 2, p. 150b-151a.